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Public Health Service





New Jersey. Legislature. Joint Committee  
on Asylum for Lunatics

REPORT

RELATIVE TO AN

ASYLUM FOR LUNATICS,

BY THE

JOINT COMMITTEE

OF

COUNCIL AND ASSEMBLY,

TO WHICH WAS REFERRED THAT PART OF THE GOVERNOR'S  
MESSAGE RELATING THERETO.

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Read February 27th, 1841, and ordered to be printed.

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## R E P O R T .

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The Joint Committee of the two Houses, to which was referred so much of the Governor's message, as relates to lunatics, and an asylum for their reception, submit the following

### R E P O R T :

By the report of the Commissioners appointed to ascertain the number of insane persons in our state, submitted to the legislature, on the 26th of February, 1840, it appears that there are of

Pauper lunatics,	- - - - -	173
Confined in jails, poor houses, cells, &c., some in chains,	- - - - -	24
In the State Penitentiary,	- - - - -	13

Their whole number may be estimated at two hundred in round numbers, all of whom are supported at public expense. In addition to these there are others who are provided for and maintained by friends, numbering about 180.

Until this late enquiry and report of Commissioners, we were not apprised of the number of insane persons within our state, nor of the extreme wretchedness and suffering to which they are exposed. They are found in jails—in the penitentiary—in poor houses and cages—chained like criminals to the floor and to the walls, from year to year—enduring cold and hunger

and solitude and nakedness. They are found in the fields and in the woods, wandering in the streets from place to place, destitute and friendless—the sport of boys and wicked men. Their situation is deplorable, indeed, and calls loudly for the prompt attention of the legislature. No age or condition in life is exempt from its visitations, and it soon levels all distinctions. True there are some whose affliction can be mitigated by kind and willing friends; and in these cases the relief afforded, through a well regulated asylum, is much more effectual for restoration and comfort, and much more economical, than any which can be applied in any private family. Few have friends able and willing to procure a watch or guard by night and day; and chains and imprisonment seem to be the only resort. Many counties have no poor house; and none have such as are adapted to the comfort or recovery of the insane. They are thrown into a cellar or garret, shut out from medical treatment, to become raving maniacs for life.

A painful instance, corroborative of the truth of these remarks, has very lately occurred, within the knowledge of two of the members of your committee: an instance which proves, conclusively, that neither education, respectability, or wealth, or indeed all these combined, can be considered as effectual safe-guards against the approach of this distressing malady. The case alluded to, is that of an individual, who, a few years since, justly occupied a high standing in society, and enjoyed the confidence of his fellow citizens, in the county where he resided. He was for many years a member of the legislature of this state; was afterwards appointed clerk of the county, and was for a long period of years, an active and efficient judge of the court. He was a man in comfortable circumstances, of good mind, and of extremely high spirit. From some cause he became reduced, and when he found his pecuniary affairs

embarrassed, his property gone, upon which he had relied for comfort in his declining days, and nothing but poverty and old age before him, added to the loss of an only son—when all this became his portion, his spirit shrunk within him. It was more than weak human nature could endure: his mind staggered beneath the load, and soon reason deserted her throne, and he was a maniac. He became violent; and in order to protect society from injury, it became necessary to confine him temporarily within the gloomy walls of the county jail. In such a situation his malady increased, and the visitor to the poor house of the county, of which he was once a valuable citizen, will now find this unfortunate gray-headed man one of its most wretched and miserable inmates; reduced to a mere skeleton, and despite of his gray hairs, and of his former respectability, bound in chains and fetters, lest he should do injury to himself and others. Philanthropy bleeds and humanity shudders at the bare recital of such a case.

And yet it is far from being an isolated case. The recent investigations that have taken place in other states, as well as in our own, have brought many instances of a similar character to light, and show an amount of suffering endured by this neglected class of our fellow beings, that can scarcely be estimated by the human mind. Their condition, is alike deplorable in all the states, except where some proper asylum has been provided. Even in Massachusetts, before the erection of her lunatic asylum, at Worcester, it was formally reported to her legislature that there were more imprisonments in the state for insanity than for debt; and that the lunatic was visited with a heavier doom than the felon.

The following extract, from an able report in relation to an asylum for the insane poor, read in the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, 11th of March, 1839, descriptive of the

places for the reception of the insane poor of that commonwealth, is, in the opinion of your committee, a faithful picture of many similar institutions in our own state.

“We have two places only”—says one of the county reports—“for the reception of the insane poor,—the common poor house and the county jail. In the latter place are generally males, who are too violent and dangerous to be kept in a common poor house. For the public peace and protection of the community, they were charged with breaches of the peace, or petty misdemeanors, that were made the pretence for confinement, and being unable to give bonds were committed. Here their society is chiefly convicts, or if kept in solitary confinement, so ill are the accommodations for this, that they suffer more than the rigour of penitentiary discipline, and thus are they kept from year to year, with the same treatment that is meted out to those convicted of high crimes. In one instance, a man, who had been a minister of the gospel, being without the means of removal, or support in a private asylum, was sent to the poor house: here he became violent and dangerous, and escaped. It was considered necessary for the protection of his family and the public from injury, that he should be committed to the public jail, where he remained a year or more, without any accommodation or comfort other than what is afforded to the common felon. He is now at a private hospital at an expense of \$3 per week to the county.”

A report from another county thus describes its accommodations for those unfortunates.

“The accommodations for the insane in the county poor house consist of a single room, in which the furious and violent are confined,—male and female in the same apartment, separated only by the length and restraint of their chains. Their hands being at liberty, they frequently strip themselves of all

covering. The condition of these furious and violent maniacs, confined in the same room, destitute of all comforts, and with every thing around calculated to aggravate their madness, is degrading and deplorable in the extreme. Bad as is the condition of poor insane lunatics, dwelling in private hovels of poverty, the condition of the violent is better there, with more comfort and hope of alleviation and relief, than in the mad apartment of the public poor house, chained with others as mad as themselves: although they may not have as regular an allowance of bread and meat in the humble cabin, yet there they may have eyes to pity, hands to afford relief, or voices to utter some comfort and consolation."

"In another county, a memorial was addressed to the board of guardians of the poor, by the attending physicians, which set forth, that they have, for a long time, regretted the defectiveness of the present arrangement for the treatment of insane patients. "The only apartments now used," they remark, "are in a damp, confined, ill ventilated and comfortless situation; calculated more to increase both the physical and mental derangement of such patients, than to co-operate with the sanative influence of medical treatment;" and they add;—"that we are not disposed to exaggerate the deficiencies and inconveniences of the present arrangement; it is only necessary to state, that since the erection of the present building, *several lives have been lost*, from the imperfect construction of the cells for the insane; and where no possible blame could attach to the keepers."

"This memorial was made part of the report of the grand jury to the court of quarter sessions, in August, 1838. At the November sessions following, the presiding judge called the particular attention of the grand jury to the hospital, and they were induced to visit the premises, accompanied by the attend-

ing physician. After a full and fair examination of their condition, the grand jury say:—"these unfortunate individuals (the insane) are now placed in confined, damp, and illy ventilated apartments on the ground floor, resembling more the cells of a prison, than any thing else. When permitted to take exercise and recreation in the open air, they are loaded like convicts with hobbles, and chains, and exposed in summer to the hot sun without the protection of a single shady tree. In this situation, they associate in the same yard with the other paupers, who, though more rational, unfeelingly provoke them with jeers and scoffs, and thus aggravate the violence of their disease. Under these circumstances, the grand jury believe it impossible to render them such medical and moral assistance, as their peculiar diseases require, and which are curable only, by a proper combination of physical, medical and moral treatment. Distressing, as it is to the feelings of humanity, it is notwithstanding true, that this class of patients, which call loudest for our sympathy and our aid, and whose disease, we are informed, requires the nicest and most exact kind of treatment, are here placed in a situation wholly unfit for the successful treatment of *any* disease, and particularly for that of *insanity*. These unfortunate beings are deprived of even the ordinary comforts of the pauper, and their derangement, instead of being cured, becomes confirmed."

And such the committee believe has been the situation and treatment of the insane poor in most of states in the Union ; and years have been suffered to pass with but little effort to better their deplorable condition. But the day has, at length, arrived when the claims of these poor sufferers are beginning to be heard and to be felt, and the voice of humanity has responded in many of our sister states. Hospitals and retreats for the insane have been erected, and are building in almost

every section of our country, well adapted to their condition and for their comfort, and provided with means calculated to win back reason to her deserted throne, and to heal the diseased imagination of the unhappy lunatic.

Upon this part of the subject an appeal to the people of Pennsylvania, on the subject of an asylum for the insane poor, holds the following language:

“With the knowledge of the advantages derived from such institutions, can we be surprised that, under the active and benevolent exertions of philanthropists, extensive pauper lunatic asylums should have been erected both in Europe and in several of the states of this Union. Without referring particularly to the efforts in other countries, it may be well to glance at those of our own.

“Massachusetts, beside the establishment at Charlestown, capable of accommodating two hundred patients, has her admirable state institution, at Worcester, which is capable of accommodating two hundred and thirty persons, and had at the close of the year, two hundred and eighteen patients. In addition to this, Boston has her own asylum for poor lunatics, situate at South Boston, and capable of accommodating one hundred patients, which was commenced in 1837, and was ready for the reception of patients in August, 1839. This hospital, it appears from the report of the superintendent, Dr. John S. Butler, was opened on the 11th of December, 1839, and had, at the time of the report, July 1st, 1840, eighty-seven lunatics. It was erected principally by the prisoners in the house of correction—is plainly but substantially built, and is said to be convenient and comfortable, and to answer well its intended purposes. Maine has her asylum on the banks of the Kennebeck, in sight of the state house, at Augusta, which is intended to accommodate one hundred poor patients. In New Hampshire,

an association has been organized ; a bill has passed the legislature to establish an asylum for poor lunatics, and a committee has been appointed to choose its location. In Vermont, an asylum has existed since 1836 ; the average number of patients at which, has been thirty-five. In Connecticut, Governor Ellsworth, in May, 1839, invited the attention of the assembly to the condition of the insane poor, and a committee of the legislature reported in favor of endowing an appropriate asylum. New York has most liberally entered into the career of benevolent sympathy. She has now three public asylums : the Bloomingdale, five miles from the city of New York, liberally endowed by the state, and not confined in its benefits to the insane poor—for the accommodation of about one hundred and fifty insane patients ; the state asylum, exclusively for the insane poor, now building at Utica, for the accommodation of one thousand patients ; and the asylum on Blackwell's Island, only one wing of which is completed, for the accommodation, in this one wing, of two hundred patients. Virginia has her two lunatic hospitals: the one situate at Williamsburg, in eastern Virginia ; the other at Staunton, on the western side of the Blue Ridge. The latter, according to the second annual report of its superintendent, Dr. Stribling, received, during the year 1838, eighty-five patients. Both institutions have been liberally endowed by the state, and are capable together of receiving two hundred and fifty patients. Maryland, during the past year, has appropriated bounteously for the benefit of her insane poor. South Carolina has made large additions to her state asylum at Columbia. Kentucky has her's, into which one hundred and seventy-six patients were received during the year 1838. Tennessee erected an asylum, not long ago, at Nashville ; and the new asylum of Ohio, at Columbus, according to the annual report of the directors for 1839, is in full and suc-

cessful operation, one hundred and fifty-seven patients having been received into it since its opening ; of whom one hundred and fourteen remain."

The examination of this subject has satisfied your committee that the condition of our insane paupers calls for prompt and decisive action ; and they would express a fervent hope that the time is not far distant when New Jersey will be classed with those of her sister states, who have laid the foundation of a system for the relief of this afflicted portion of our population. Surely they have claims upon our sympathies : their sufferings come home to the feelings of every portion of the community. Who among us can be sure of exemption from this dire calamity ? It spares neither age nor sex ; and although it is often the result of indulgence in morbid appetites and vicious propensities, still the temperate and the virtuous are not always spared. It cannot always be averted nor avoided ; yet, blessed be God, it can be mitigated ; its miseries and its horrors may be lessened even where it cannot be cured. The evidence upon this point is ample, a mass of which may be found in the report of the Commissioners appointed to ascertain the number of insane persons in this state, submitted to the legislature February 26th, 1840. In addition to this your committee beg leave to present a few extracts from the annual report of the Ohio lunatic asylum for 1840. The directors of that institution say in their report to the general assembly : " During the past year the operation of the asylum has been fully tested, and the report of the superintendent shows the result to have equalled the most sanguine expectations of its friends. Within that time fifty-three cases have been cured ; many of them of long standing and of the worst forms of insanity. Of the average number of one hundred and thirty-one for the year, seventy-eight have been discharged ; fifty-three of whom were cured,

being equal to 67.94 per cent. Of thirty-four old cases discharged, fourteen were cured, equal to 41 per cent.; and of forty-four recent cases discharged, thirty-nine were cured, equal to 88.63 per cent.; a degree of success not excelled in any institution of the kind in our country, so far as the directors are advised. This result is the more favorable, as all cases are denominated *recent*, of not more than one year's duration.

“The disproportion of cures between old and recent cases, confirms the fact, that the earlier a case of insanity is treated, the greater the prospect of success. This fact cannot be too strongly impressed upon the public mind.”

Of the good conduct of the inmates of this institution, and of the system of treatment there adopted, the superintendent in his report thus speaks: “This institution has now been in operation nearly two years, and it is a pleasing reflection that so many dangerous and violent persons have been received and placed under discipline and treatment, without the occurrence of one serious accident or personal injury to either officers, attendants, or patients; and we can safely say that a sum less than one hundred dollars, would pay for all the damage done to the buildings and furniture by the violence of the patients during this time.

“The moral treatment of the insane, we have thought, can best be illustrated in connection with a brief description of leading and important cases; we therefore only remark, in general terms, that our government is kind and respectful, and, as far as possible, parental; with a becoming firmness, at all times, in respect to the order and discipline which reason and experience have approved. As a primary step, we are anxious to secure the confidence and good will of our patients, and endeavor to retain it, by kind hospitality and attention to their wants: always desirous that they shall have every allowable

privilege, and participate in the enjoyment of every pleasure which their capacity and condition may admit. Males and females, in separate parties, frequently ramble over the country in all directions, accompanied only by a single attendant. The matron, (Mrs. C. W. Atcherson,) regularly invites all the ladies who behave well, to her social parties on Thursday afternoon: and a carriage is always ready in pleasant weather, if they feel anxious to take a ride. The gentlemen are provided with a variety of amusing games, and books and stationery are freely distributed to all. We have also our sports upon the green, and our music and dancing parties in the halls. We celebrate the national independence on the fourth of July, and hold the annual election, for the officers of state, in October. But above all and before every thing else in the world, for the substantial welfare and improvement of both mind and body, is regular and profitable labor. 'Man was made to be active: even in Paradise he was employed in the healthy and pleasant exercises of cultivating a garden.' It is impossible for us to go into particulars; but we may observe that many of our male patients find useful employment, at present, in clearing up the premises and grading and levelling the grounds; in attending to the vegetable gardens; assisting in the care and management of the stock upon the farm and preparing all the fuel that is used. The females find constant employment within doors, and it will be sufficient to say of them that the making and mending of all the wearing apparel of the indigent, and all the washing and ironing for the entire household, is chiefly performed by their assistance.

"According to an accurate estimate of the male and female work, performed by our patients, in the last six months, made by the assistant physician, (Samuel M. Smith, M. D.,) we find them entitled to the credit of three thousand six hundred and

ninety days' labor: so that with all our amusements, we belong to the laboring classes, and may be considered an industrious, though crazy, community. We never, indeed, fail to improve the condition of any one who will agree to work, and with many it is the best medicine the world can afford."

The report of the superintendent proceeds to give a detailed account of some of the most interesting cases that had been cured during the year, one of which, as a specimen, the committee beg leave to introduce.

"No. 68. Was a lady near the prime of life, whose insanity was of two months' duration, at the time of her admission into the asylum. At first a cheerless listlessness, amounting almost to the hopelessness of imbecility, was the prevalent feature of her case. For some weeks after her entrance, she could not be induced to converse or observe any thing around her; but sat in listless silence, regardless of all the attentions bestowed upon her, and apparently desiring to exclude all observation. At last, by perseverance in all the appliances of kindness which her situation required, she could, by earnest solicitation, be induced to raise her head, yet with a trembling beconing the lowest humility. Her natural simplicity of character had, by the invasion of insanity, degenerated into the merest childishness, characterized by even more than a child's timidity. To this was added a most depressing despondency, darkened by the gloomy forebodings of a religious melancholy. With this saddening companionship of unhappy illusions, the mind retired into its gloomy recesses, and there seemed to brood over its woes; and for a time every effort to drag it from this cheerless contemplation seemed fruitless. But perseverance at last secured the slight change alluded to, and a gradual improvement continued to reward our labors. By degrees the dark shadows which melancholy had projected on the countenance,

began to disappear, and joy to relumine with its smile the cheerless despondency ; and over all, returning reason began to assume its wonted sway. She was first induced to engage with freedom in conversation, then to employ herself in knitting, and by slow degrees her interest extended to things around her, early begetting a warm attachment for her attendants. At last there seemed the trembling suspense between hope and fear ; between an humble faith, that almost feared to trust, and yet casting away despair, dared to hope. She soon became conscious of her true situation, and from that period her improvement was rapid and uninterrupted. Anxiety and affection for her friends and children returned. She attended, with pleasure and interest, the religious services of the house, and on the Sabbath was in her place, undistinguished, attending on the public service of the sanctuary. She left us with a heart swelling with gratitude to the God of mercies, again to fill the place of an affectionate mother and devoted wife."

This is but one instance of thousands that occur every year in such institutions, to gladden the hearts of the afflicted lunatics and their friends, and the fact is established, that recent cases of insanity, can, in most cases, be cured by the application of those means, which a well regulated asylum affords.

Had the individual, whose case has been cited, been thrown into the common poor house, bound in chains, and subjected to the treatment usually adopted in those miserable abodes of wretchedness, there can be little doubt but that her malady would have been confirmed, and instead of being returned in a few months, to her family, to fill the place of an affectionate mother and devoted wife, she would, in all human probability, have passed the remnant of her days in chains, and confined in cells, which should more appropriately be occupied by the hardened criminal.

With regard to the cost of erecting a suitable building for the insane poor of our state, your committee would remark that the lunatic asylum at Worcester, Massachusetts, which is considered the most perfect and best arranged building for the purpose in our country, was constructed and finished for something short of \$24,000, not including the grounds and furniture. And it is thought by many competent judges, that with equal economy, \$20,000 may be sufficient for a durable edifice, calculated to accommodate all the insane poor of our state, and probably to furnish accommodations also, for many whose means or friends would enable them to pay a fair compensation. Your committee believe that \$25,000 would be sufficient to procure the grounds and erect and furnish the necessary buildings for the accommodation of all our insane poor, that would be suitable patients for such an establishment.

The whole number of *pauper lunatics*, in this state, has been estimated, in round numbers, at two hundred, all of whom are supported at public expense. The average cost, per week, of their maintenance as paupers, is believed to be about one dollar and seventy-five cents, which is ninety-one dollars per annum, equal to a tax upon the counties of \$18,200 per annum.

The expenditures of the Ohio lunatic asylum for the year ending Nov. 15, 1840, amounted to only \$16,551 87, a less sum than that actually paid annually by the citizens of our several counties, as will appear by the foregoing calculations, for the wretched maintenance of their insane poor.

The average number supported in this institution was one hundred and thirty-one, and their attendants, including the superintendent and physician, are twenty-five. Making about one attendant to six patients, which is about the proportion of other institutions.

The population of Connecticut is about equal to that of New

Jersey, and probably their lunatics bear about the same proportion as our own. The expense of their maintenance at the Connecticut Retreat, for the insane, averaged \$10,271 per year, for three successive years. From all the information the committee were able to obtain upon the subject, they are of the opinion that, after the completion of suitable buildings for the purpose, an annual appropriation of from 12 to \$15,000, would be sufficient to sustain the institution with all our pauper lunatics, who are fit subjects for an asylum. This is a less sum than their maintenance now costs the citizens of the towns and counties where they are now supported.

So satisfied indeed, are the poor law commissioners of England, of the economy of such establishments, that they are every where erecting their asylums for the insane paupers, separate and distinct from the poor houses. But, perhaps, the economy of these institutions cannot be better shown than by quoting the following extract, from the sixth annual report of the trustees of the Worcester asylum.

“ In order to present this subject strictly as a pecuniary or economical matter, the trustees requested the superintendent to prepare a separate table, shewing the actual expense of twenty of the earliest cases received into the hospital, which, owing to the duration of the disease when admitted, were incurable, and therefore still remain; and doubtless will continue a charge upon the state as long as life lasts. These cases are not selected, but are taken in their order. They are the first twenty cases of admission, which now remain. Their expense before admission, is computed at *one dollar and fifty cents* a week. These cases have already cost the commonwealth *one thousand five hundred and fifty dollars and fifty cents* each. On the other hand, and as a contrast to the above, the table shews the actual expense of the last twenty cases, which have been

discharged from the hospital cured. It amounts only to *forty-seven and a half dollars each*. Hence it appears, that the expense already incurred for taking care of twenty cases, which, from neglect, had been suffered to run on until they became incurable, has been more than thirty-two times greater than the expense of the same number of cases, for which early and proper provision was made. The recent cases are now well; the old ones will doubtless continue a charge through life. However extraordinary it may appear, it is still true, that taking an average chance for cures, it would have been a pecuniary saving to the state to have seasonable care of these old cases, though at an expense of eighty dollars a week, rather than, by neglect, to have incurred the necessity of supporting them, even up to the present time."

The committee think it is not an extravagant opinion, that the present expense of supporting the pauper lunatics by townships and counties for two years, if judiciously applied to an asylum, would procure the lands and erect the necessary buildings. And if we were to consult only our pecuniary interest, it would not be difficult to show, that for a period of ten years, a well regulated asylum would be the cheapest mode of supporting our pauper lunatics. But when the claims of humanity and justice, concurring with public sentiment and true economy, all lead to the same conclusion, demanding for the insane paupers of our state the comforts which a jail cannot provide; we trust the legislature will not hesitate to begin the foundation of an institution, in which the most afflictive visitations of Divine Providence shall no longer be considered and punished as crimes.

Deeply impressed with the conviction that the time has arrived when New Jersey should act promptly upon this subject; and desirous that she should not be behind her sister states in

their philanthropic exertions, your committee unanimously submit, for the consideration of the legislature, the following resolutions, viz:—

*Resolved*, 1st. That the confinement of insane persons in jails, with criminals, is subversive of all distinction between calamity and guilt, and punishes the misfortune which it is the duty of society to relieve.

2d. That as experience has shown that recent insanity, in most cases, is readily cured, it is highly expedient that the state should provide a suitable institution for the comfort and relief of the insane poor, and to remove them from prisons and poor houses.

3d. That an asylum be erected at the expense of the state, at some proper point, to be selected by commissioners, with the approbation of the Governor, upon such plan as they shall deem best adapted for the purpose of such an institution.

4th. That the committee be instructed to report a bill providing for the objects expressed in the above resolutions.

JOSIAH M. REEVE,  
M. D. CANFIELD,  
ALB'T G. DOREMUS,

} Committee  
of Council.

ALEX'R G. CATTELL,  
BENJ. F. BROOKFIELD,  
MAURICE BEESLEY,  
GEO. W. SMYTH,

} Committee  
of Assembly.

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY, February 27th, 1841.





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